

FOLK-REMEDIES FROM ḤAḌRAMAWT

By R. B. SERJEANT

THE MS of miscellaneous contents from which this treatise has been extracted was lent me by its owner, Shaiḫ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Ḳādir Bā Maṭraf, Assistant State Secretary to the Mukallā Government ; a microfilm is now in the Library of the School.

Of the author, Muḥammad Baḥraḳ ¹ (H. 869/A.D. 1465 – H. 930/A.D. 1524) I have already given some account in connexion with his manual *al-Nubdhah al-Muḥarrirah*.² Brockelmann does not, however, allude to the work from which this brief extract is drawn, *Ḥilyat al-Banāt wa-’l-Banīn*. I have, in fact, actually seen, though not used, a copy of the complete work in the Āl Kāf Library ³ at Tarīm, transcribed in H. 1279/A.D. 1862–3, and entitled *Ḥilyat al-Banāt wa-’l-Banīn fī Muḥimmāt . . .* etc., but *al-Nūr al-Sāfir* ⁴ cites it as *Ḥilyat al-Banāt wa-’l-Banīn fī-mā yuḥtādġ ilaih fī Amr al-Dīn*.

The *Ḥilyah* consists of three sections, each subdivided into a number of bābs. Section 1 has 24 bābs, of which Bāb Adwiyah Nāfi’ah is probably the most interesting, but on a superficial examination most of the work seemed very orthodox in material and treatment.

The value of the document lies in the fact that the remedies are clearly taken from Ḥaḍramī practice, not epitomized from some larger standard work. Though the treatise only covers one small part of folk medicine, many of these remedies are probably still in use to-day. The provenance of these medicaments is in itself of some interest. The abundant materials relating to folk medicine collected in southern Arabia I hope to embody in Vol. II of *Prose and poetry from Ḥaḍramawt*.

CHAPTER ON USEFUL DRUGS, IF GOD WILL

CRYSTAL ⁵ (ḥaḍjar al-mahā), when pounded down with water, and a woman giving suck anointed with it, causes her milk to flow.

FENUGREEK ⁶ (ḥilbah), when cooked and applied to the breast of a woman in milk, cuts off her milk.

GALLS ⁷ (‘afṣ), when pounded down and rubbed on the rectum (maḳ‘adah)

¹ Brockelmann, *SUP*, II, 554–5.

² ‘Forms of plea, a Šāfi‘ī manual from al-Šihr’, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, xxx, 1955, 1–15.

³ See *BSOAS*, xiii, 2, 1950, 286.

⁴ Ibn al-‘Aidarūs, *al-Nūr al-Sāfir*, Baghdād, 1934, 147.

⁵ This term is evidently unfamiliar, as a marginal note adds, ‘Huwa ’l-billawr’.

⁶ Fenugreek is much eaten in the Yemen. cf. my article ‘Star-calendars’, *Anthropos*, xlix, 1954, 452. Its use as described here seems to be universal. Ḥaḍramis say the seeds especially have medicinal properties.

⁷ Galls seem to have been imported from India into Aden. cf. *Mulaḳḥḳhaṣ al-Fitan*, Ambrosiana MS no. H. 130, composed in H. 815/A.D. 1412–3.

put it back as it was. So also POMEGRANATE-HUSK (*ḳishr al-rummān*), when cooked in water and children sit in the infusion, helps them (in a case of) prolapse (*ḳhurūdj al-maḳ'adah*).

PUMPKIN-RIND (*ḳishr al-ḳar'*), when burned and applied to the raw area in circumcision of boys, does them good.

CORAL ¹ (*mardjān*), when suspended on an infant, makes it safe against all ills (*'āhāt*).

HENNA,² when a child's foot be tinted with it at the appearance of smallpox (*djadri*), none will come up to his eyes, by the grace of God.

WHITE OF EGG, when applied as ointment, removes the traces of smallpox.

ONION, when alopecia (*ḥuwailiḳ*),³ known as 'fox's disease' (*dā' al-tha'lab*), which is a withering in the growth of the hair of the head, is rubbed with it, causes it to grow quickly by the grace of God.

GALL-DYE (*ḳhiḍāb al-'afṣ*), when rubbed on ringworm (*ḥazāzah*) removes it after application.

SECTION

ROSEWATER (*mā' al-ward*), when a person afflicted with a feverish headache sniffs it and it is applied to his brow, soothes the pain. So, too, ḥannūn, i.e. the HENNA-FLOWER, also called *fāghiyah*, when it is pounded down and the head anointed with it, soothes feverish headaches by the grace of God.

JAVANESE INCENSE ⁴ (*al-lubān al-Djāwī*), when someone with a cold fumi-gates himself with it, does him good by the grace of God. When a little *SHIHRI* INCENSE is ground down and inhaled into the nose it frees sneezing. So, too, GINGER, COSTUS ⁵ (*ḳust*), BLACK CUMMIN, and the hoof of an ass, if an epileptic be fumigated with it (*sic*), he will recover by the grace of God.

WOMAN'S MILK, when dropped into the eye of a person with an affection of the eye (i.e. conjunctivitis or trachoma), will do it good by the grace of God.

CUMMIN (*kammūn*), when masticated with the saliva of the teeth, then dropped into the eye from a cloth does it good (in a case of) a lesion causing the eye to weep (*ṭurfah*).

SAFFRON (*za'farān*), when pounded up with rosewater and applied to the eye, stops the tear, and dries up watering of the eye.

¹ According to the *Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan* coral was imported to Aden from Egypt and India. It is not commonly seen now in south Arabia, but a coral coloured bead is widely sold and sewn on to clothing or hung with or without amulets on children's necks.

² Women of all classes tint their feet with henna and draw patterns on it.

³ *Ḥuwailiḳ* is evidently a local word, *dā' al-tha'lab* is doubtless from the Greek.

⁴ Javanese incense, *Djāwī*, is still used in southern Arabia. A little red-hot charcoal is placed in a stone or pottery incense-burner and the incense added. The Arab sits over the incense-burner, draping his clothing tent-wise over and around it so that the scented smoke pervades his whole person. Sultan Badr b. 'Abdullāh of Ḥaḍramawt who ascended the throne in H. 1058 (A.D. 1648), had in Zufār groves (*ghābāt*) of *lubān*-incense (*olibanum*) which he used to crop. He had large factories (*ma'āmil*) to clean it, and used to lade his own ships with it and they would sail to the neighbouring lands. (Muh. b. Hāshim, *Ḥaḍramawt Tārikh al-Dawlat al-Kathīriyah*, Cairo, 1948, 76.)

⁵ Costus is a well-known import to Aden from India. See *Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan* and other sources.

GOAT'S LIVER, when roasted and that which runs out of it applied to the eye, does good to a person who cannot see at night.

RADISH (baḳal, *Raphanus sativus*), i.e. fidjl, when cooked with salt, expressed from a cloth, and dropped in the ear, gives relief from earache.

GARLIC (thūm), when a tooth with a cavity is rubbed with it, soothes the pain. ACACIA RESIN (ḳuṭrān),¹ when a little is dropped into the cavity of a carious tooth, relieves its pain.

RED BUṢAILAH and ROSEWATER,² when pounded up and (the mouth) rinsed with them and vinegar and retained for an hour in the mouth, are useful against sores (buthūr) of the mouth.

A mithkāl-weight of GOLD, when retained in the mouth, renders it fragrant and removes bad breath.

SULPHUR, when the mouth is fumigated with it through a (millet)-straw (ḳaṣabah), which one places in one's mouth, makes the mucus ('alaḳ) in the throat drop.

CINNAMON³ (ḳirfah), when cooked in some water with a little resin ('ilk), is good for a vomiting person. So, too, CLOVES (ḳaranful), when one eats a little of them, put away the heavings of the stomach (ghathayān).

SANDAL-WOOD (ṣandal), when mixed with rosewater and a little camphor⁴ and applied to the stomach, does good (in the case of) burning thirst.

GLASSWORT⁵ (uṣhnān), when cooked in water and some of the latter is drunk helps (in the case of) a distended stomach and winds (riyāḥ).⁶

GHĀLIYAH-OIL⁷ (duhn), when the navel is oiled with it, is good for stomach-ache (magḥṣ).

¹ C. v. Landberg, *Glossaire daïnois*, describes ḳuṭrān at Baiḥān as 'cendres du rāk', but in Ḥadramawt, 'on le fait de l'arbre sumur, en l'incisant, jusqu'à ce que sorte la résine'.

² Buṣailah and rosewater are sprinkled on shrouds (cf. 'The Cemeteries of Tarīm', *Le Muséon*, LXII, 1949, 137).

³ The *Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan* gives two types of cinnamon, that imported from Malabar, and a type known as al-Silī (from Ceylon?).

⁴ Chinese camphor is noted by the *Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan* and indeed by all Arabic sources from the earliest times, and sandal-wood the well-known perfume appears in the *Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan* as an import from Macassar (al-ṣandal al-Maḳāṣarī); a type al-Khūrī (or al-Khawrī) is also mentioned, the name perhaps referring to the Coromandel coast.

⁵ According to A. Siggel, *Arabisch-deutsches Wörterbuch der Stoffe* . . . , Berlin, 1950, uṣhnān is Pottaschen-pflanze. z. B. *Salsola Kali* L., *Salicornia* u. a. Cheriopodiaceen. Lane, *Lexicon*, Kali, glasswort, potassium carbonate. It is probably still in use in the Aden Protectorate. Hamdānī, *Ṣifat Djaṣirat al-'Arab*, ed. D. H. Müller, Leiden, 1884, 157, gives the word ḥurḍ as a synonym of uṣhnān.

⁶ Rīḥ is used in a much wider sense than 'wind' in southern Arabia, for certain bodily affections. Again, near Shabwah, Bedouin meeting us covered their faces when speaking to us as a protection against a rīḥ, presumably an infection.

⁷ For the various recipes for ghāliyah, a scent known all over the medieval Arab world, see K. Garbers, *Buch über die Chemie des Parfüms und die Distillationen*, Leipzig, 1948 (al-Kindī). It was imported to Aden from Zufār al-Ḥabūzī according to the *Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fitan*. The recipe for the Zufār perfume is given in verses quoted by Abū Makḥramah (O. Löfgren (ed.), *Arabische Texte* . . . , Uppsala, 1936, II, 1, 90), musk, ambergris, a perfume, prepared from a black pitch-like substance called rāmak, with an oil or ghee base, all mixed together in specified proportions.

GUM ARABIC (*ṣamgh*), when two *ḳāflahs*¹ of it are drunk in an ocque of cow-ghee, stops exhausting bleeding from the womb, repeated three times.

BUTTER (*zubd*), when a woman rubs herself with it after menstruation, hastens conception by the grace of God.

CORAL, when suspended on a woman, she will not abort her foetus by the grace of God. COW-DUNG (*daf'*), when a woman whose foetus has died in her belly fumigates herself with it she will cast it by the grace of God. IBEX-HORN (*ḳarn al-wi'l*),² when any of it is suspended on a woman, eases her delivery. When a woman, after parturition, takes an ocque of white sugar and two ocques of cow-ghee, and it (*sic*) is mixed and she licks it, it is good for the belly-pains which come after child-birth.

God is Most Knowing

¹ There are to-day ten *ḳāflahs* to the *ūḳīyah* or ocque which is equivalent to the weight of a Maria Theresa dollar.

² It must be recalled that the ibex is an animal of special significance in Ḥadramawt. It is the animal that is sought after by the hunters in the ancient ceremonial hunting of the country. On the way back from Hūd one of our servants bought two ibex teeth from passing Bedouin after an argument lasting until our two parties were nearly out of earshot of one another. These teeth he had mounted on silver to suspend round the necks of his children.